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WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON THE WORLD REFUGEE YEAR

(Address by Francis E. Walter, M.C. D. 15th
District, Pennsylvania)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You will forgive me, I hope, for dispensing with niceties and generalities which the occasion and the setting of this meeting may call for. Instead, I shall take the liberty of submitting to you frankly a few thoughts and a few facts.

My legislative experience in the field of immigration, displaced persons and refugees extends now over a period of some 14 years beginning immediately after World War II. This experience as well as my modest participation in some international activities related to that field, has taught me that there are several ways of approaching the refugee problem.

First--there is the emotional approach. It usually generates more compassion than action.

Next--there is the oratorical approach producing, by definition, words rather than deeds.

Then--there is the combination of the two approaches, resulting in the game of numbers and developing into a sort of auction reflected in some recently introduced legislation. Yes, amateurish surveys coupled with the desire to attract public attention, have resulted in the appearance of legislative proposals replete with unrealistic numbers of refugees allegedly desiring to enter this country, numbers bearing little, if any, relation to facts and figures assembled by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration. In my opinion, it is the emotional approach to the refugee problem, combined with oratorical efforts, which is responsible for the appearance of those unrealistic figures. Having presided over two recent international meetings devoted to the discussion of the refugee problem, I found myself on the receiving end--so to speak--of overzealousness and it is, probably, that experience which makes me a cold realist.

As I look around this hall, I see many people with whom I have cooperated both in this country and abroad in finding ways and means to alleviate the plight of refugees. Thus, addressing this particular gathering, I feel that I may be permitted to urge you not to use either the emotional nor the oratorical concept in your deliberations, as well as to avoid the pitfalls and the futility of the numbers' auction. I know that most of you assembled in this room are able, qualified, and equipped with sufficient experience to approach the problem realistically.

What I have in mind in the first place, is to invite you not to think and plan in terms of what some like to call a "definite" and a "final" solution of the refugee problem.

No such solution is possible as long as we live in a world divided between the free and the enslaved.

No such solution is possible as long as freedom and economic opportunities beckon from the free lands to human beings oppressed by tyrannical regimes regardless of the name under which they function.

No "crash programs", no "speed-ups", no "mop-up operations" will wipe out the refugee problem as long as conditions generating that problem continue to exist.

I do not say these things for home consumption only. A few weeks ago, when I had the honor of presiding over a special session of the Council of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration in Geneva, I indicated to the representatives of the many nations gathered around the table that the World Refugee Year should not be misconstrued to be a "mop-up" operation.

In my opinion, no such "one shot" operation is conceivable. Realistic thinking and realistic planning require the awareness that, as long as there is tyranny, misery, slavery and oppression, there will always be human beings who will decide to pull out their stakes and leave their homelands, seeking freedom and economic opportunities abroad.

Sometimes the influx of refugees into the free world is but a trickle. Sometimes it is a mass exodus like the

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of 1956. But certainly, not even an armistice in the cold war, an armistice based on the fallacy of co-existence of the incompatible--a fallacy of co-existence of slavery and freedom--not even such an armistice will stop the drive of people out from the lands where Orwell's nightmare has become a reality.

With that in mind, I have endeavored to equip the United States with a long-range legal instrumentality which--if wisely used--could contribute to the resettlement of refugees and become an important factor in the widening of international cooperation and partnership of the free nations.

Earlier this morning I introduced in the House of Representatives a resolution, the enactment of which will, in my opinion, give the United States such an instrumentality.

My resolution is based on the experience gained in 1956 and in 1957, when, under one of the provisions of the Walter-McCarran Act, the United States was able to lead the other free nations in providing a safe haven and resettlement for the Hungarian refugees.

In line with this experience, my resolution amplifies the authority vested in the Attorney General of the United States under section 212 (d) (5) of the Immigration and Nationality Act to parole into the United States certain aliens, if he deems such action to be in the public interest.

It could be--as it seems to me--that the existing statute is sufficient to permit continuous United States participation in providing resettlement for refugees in this country. However, inasmuch as the parole authority now contained in the law is discretionary in nature, and the Attorney General of the United States may not feel that the Congress desired him to use that authority in

the absence of reasons which could be deemed to be emergent, the resolution which I introduced this morning states specifically the intent of the Congress by reiterating the discretionary authority already available, and amplifying it through the use of defined criteria of eligibility of refugees for parole entry.

The criteria are patterned upon a well tested definition of the refugee-escapee contained now in section 15 of the Act of September 15, 1957, known as Public Law 85-316.

My resolution does not contain any numerical "ceilings", nor does it prescribe any termination dates. Its purpose is to give the Attorney General of the United States, acting upon the recommendation of the Secretary of State, a long-range legal weapon with which to operate in coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United States Escapee Program under continuous supervision of the Congress.

I am aware of the fact that under my resolution the Congress is actually called upon to express its full confidence that the Attorney General of the United States will use the power vested in him with foresight and care, with the best interests of the United States remaining the governing factor of his decisions. I am hopeful that the resolution, if enacted, will permit the United States to induce our allies and friends to share with us the responsibility for the resettlement of refugees and to recognize that task to be a joint and not a one-sided undertaking.

The Congress will maintain continuous close scrutiny of the parole operation conducted under the terms of my resolution by reviewing reports which the Attorney General of the United States will be directed to submit to the Senate and the House of Representatives. Should the Congress, at any time, decide that the parole operations affecting refugees should be terminated, a simple resolution passed by either the Senate or the House of Representatives will have the statutory effect of terminating the Attorney General's special authority.

Further, and again in line with our experience with Hungarian refugees, my resolution provides for the granting

of permanent residence status to refugees admitted under parole after they have been in the United States for at least two years. After the adjustment of their status, they will be granted the benefit of the original date of entry for naturalization purposes.

I believe that in drafting my resolution I have succeeded in steering clear of the numbers' game, as well as of "crash programs" originating from the feeling that a "deadline must be met".

I believe that I have also given the Department of State the opportunity to negotiate with other governments a correlated and parallel international effort to secure a fair and equitable distribution of the refugees among more nations than those who have so far made the most sizeable contribution in this field.

I would feel that I am being remiss in my duty if I would conclude my remarks at this point without leaving one additional thought with you.

Since the end of World War II, the United States admitted 3 million immigrants. Since Hitler's advent to power this country has admitted 3.5 million immigrants. At least 1.5 million of these immigrants could be classified as refugee-escapees as we now define this term in our laws.

What happened to this mass of humanity? We know, of course, that the majority of immigrants who entered our country in the last two decades, are of a character very much different from the type of immigrants who arrived at our shores around the turn of the century. What is the nature and the extent of the new immigrants' contribution to our economy, to our scientific achievements, to our arts and literature, to our politics, and to our rate of crime? What is the immigrants' contribution to the increase of the population of our prisons? What is the immigrants' contribution to our armed forces, our universities, our insane asylums, our orphanages? There is no answer to these questions.

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In leafing over old congressional documents, I found that no study of the immigrant in the United States, no study worthy of this name, that is, has been made in the last fifty years. A commission appointed in 1907 produced reports the size of a good library. That was in 1911 and nothing was done in that field since, except politically inspired reports, unworthy of that name, and propaganda booklets produced and peddled by people with strong self-serving motives of one kind or another.

The 1911 report had a most profound influence on our immigration policy and our immigration legislation. After half of a century has passed, it is certainly time to assemble a group of impartial specialists in the various fields of human endeavor for the purpose of giving this country the benefit of a study answering some of the questions which many Americans are asking before they decide whether our long-range immigration policy should be changed.

There are 100 million more people in this country than there were when the commission of 1907 was constituted. More than 50 million children have been born in the United States since World War II. By 1970 there will be 210 million Americans, 20 million of whom will be people over 65 years of age.

What is the capacity of the United States to absorb people? Whom and how many immigrants should we admit? Who should they be? What should be the basis for their selection?

I know full well that I could pyramid questions of this sort without anywhere finding the answers.

It seems to me that the initiative for scientific study of immigration's impact upon all facets of life in the United States should most appropriately emanate from you, Ladies and Gentlemen. In my opinion, it should not be a study undertaken by a governmental agency and it should not be a congressional venture. This is a field where citizens' initiative should take over so that institutions of learning, qualified foundations, and individual experts could work together.

In launching such a study this meeting will leave a lasting, most valuable imprint on the history^{books} of this nation.